

They Labor in Vain

by [Jeffrey Burghauer](#) (May 2024)



Cain and Abel –Titian, 1543-45

*Except the Lord build the house,
they labor in vain that build it. –Psalm 127:1*

**Whoever endeavors to build his domain,
His sanctified hearth, but to build it without**

The backing of Heaven endeavors in vain.

Suburban consumers, so crazily sane,
Are doubtful that anything hovers about
Whoever endeavors to build his domain.

Those eyeless in Gaza, bereft in Ukraine,
And slashed in Sonora despairingly shout
That even the heavens endeavor in vain—

That even the power that disciplined Cain
Let Abel be slain. That benignly devout
Endeavorer bidding to build his domain

Of nothing but Ardor (the echo of Pain,
The bulwark against the disaster of Doubt)
Discovered that heaven endeavors in vain.

Destroy me, if only to prove that Your reign,
Like any Real Thing, is what no one can flout;
Whoever endeavors to build his domain
Sans Heaven's assistance endeavors in vain.

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Jeffrey Burghauser is a teacher in Columbus, Ohio. He was educated at SUNY-Buffalo and the University of Leeds. He currently studies the five-string banjo with a focus on pre-WWII picking styles. A former artist-in-residence at the Arad Arts Project (Israel), his poems have appeared (or are forthcoming) in *Appalachian Journal*, *Fearsome Critters*, *Iceview*, *Lehrhaus*, and *New English Review*. Jeffrey's book-length collections are available on [Amazon](#), and his website is www.jeffreyburghauser.com.

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